



Critique d'art

Actualité internationale de la littérature critique sur l'art contemporain

40 | 2012
CRITIQUE D'ART 40

Jacques Villeglé – François Dufrêne – Pierre Restany: “collective realities”

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/5707>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.5707

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 November 2012

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Anne-Lise Quesnel, « Jacques Villeglé – François Dufrêne – Pierre Restany: “collective realities” », *Critique d'art* [Online], 40 | 2012, Online since 01 November 2013, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/5707> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.5707

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

Archives de la critique d'art

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Traduit du français par Charlotte Gould

- 1 Pieces of writing, photographs, publications, videos and audio recordings to do with the work of Jacques Villeglé are among the many collections held at the Archives de la critique d'art. These documents, all produced at key moments of the artist's career, are testimonies to the many different ways his work was received between 1959, when he first presented his ripped posters in an institutional exhibition, and the beginning of the 2000s, when he decided to stop gathering the medium and when the Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois gallery launched a major retrospective of this colossal body of work.¹
- 2 First of all, two registration forms for the 1959 and 1961 editions of the Biennale de Paris are evidence that Jacques Villeglé actually took part in the event, the brainchild of André Malraux who had only just been appointed at the head of the newly-minted Ministry of Cultural Affairs. In 1959, the ripped posters antagonised the jury made up of artists under 35 as well as of a handful of older artists, namely Bernard Lorjou and his group² who signed the manifesto *Des hommes témoins : de la Nausée à la Colère* (October 3, 1959), a retrograde commotion which pointed to how remarkable appropriation was on the art scene of the time. Alain Jouffroy calls J. Villeglé a “fore-seer” in his eponymous book of 1974³, in which he devises a new critical approach for “this mental revolution, that of the gaze, that of the imagination.”⁴ A. Jouffroy's archives, held in Rennes, comprise documents ascertaining that an exchange took place with J. Villeglé in the 1980s, when A. Jouffroy was commissioned to interview artists for a survey about the current situation of

the avant-garde, which was published in *Le Monde diplomatique*. Furthermore, two recorded conversations conducted by Catherine Francblin between February and March 2001 give an insight into the preparation of the catalogue for the exhibition dedicated to the artist and entitled *Images : affiches lacérées 1958-1991*, which took place at the Vallois gallery that same year. The catalogue is the second instalment in the major collaboration undertaken by the gallery in order to seriously enhance the value of the ripped posters, within a larger series of events based on the different themes of J. Villeglé’s *catalogue raisonné*.⁵

“Group Work,” Faucheux, Dufrêne, Hains and Villeglé, Biennale de Paris, 1961

RECEVU 01/10/61/12

Biennale de Paris Manifestation Biennale et Internationale
des jeunes artistes
11, rue Berryer, Paris 8 Mac. 05-13

(5) Travaux d'équipe

TITRE DE L'ŒUVRE : *Auditorium.*

Nom et prénom des Collaborateurs	Date de naissance	Spécialisation de chaque collaborateur (architecture, peinture, sculpture, etc....)
(dans l'ordre où ils devront figurer au catalogue)		
1°) FAUCHEUX		
2°) DUFRÈNE François 2 rue Vincennes 75012 Paris	21/9/1930	dessins d'affiches
3°) HAINS Raymond 26 rue Delambre	8/4/1935	
4°) VILLEGÉ Jacques 4 rue J. Tuilleries 75001 Paris	27/3/26	affiches lacérées
5°) BOURGEOIS Pierre		

A document taken from the Biennale de Paris collection 1959-1985, Archives de la critique d'art

- 3 Unsurprisingly, among the collections available at the Archives de la critique d'art, Pierre Restany's provides the most extensive documentation on J. Villeglé. Indeed, from 1960 (the year New Realism was founded) onwards, P. Restany filled a file entitled “affichistes”⁶ which he kept adding to his whole life. While art historians, and rightly so, have remembered both the unifying role played by the critic and the importance of his theoretical writings as well as the effective way he promoted the movement at home and abroad, it seems however that this major figure contributed to painting a one-sided story of J. Villeglé's career, by minimizing both some of his collaborations, especially with François Dufrêne, and the crucial impact some events had which took place before the group was founded.

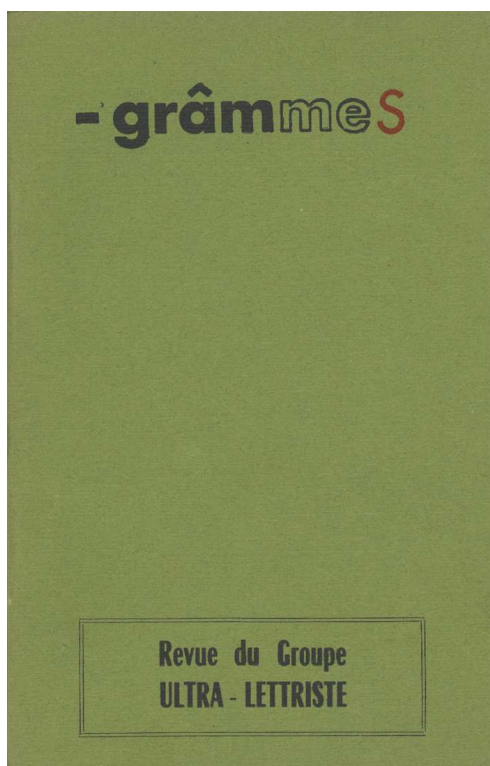
The Affichistes on the day they signed the Nouveaux Réalistes manifesto



Documents from the archives of Pierre Restany © Harry Shunk

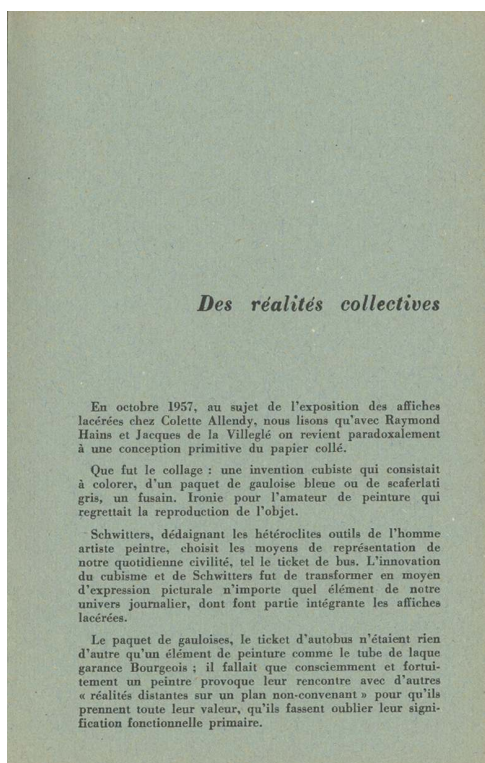
- 4 By comparing P. Restany's archives with the artist's personal archives – which can be accessed at his Parisian office-cum-studio – one can notice this disaffection, which Villeglé had already made explicit himself. The international symposium *Le Demi-siècle de Pierre Restany* organized in 2006 at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, suggested new readings of, and approaches to the art critic's activity. It inaugurated its revision and allowed J. Villeglé to give his own point of view. In conversation with Odile Felgine in 2010,⁷ J. Villeglé was level-headed when rectifying a few points concerning this major critic whom he had known for years. More recently, an interview with Henry Périer printed in the Marseilles Museum of contemporary art catalogue, *Jacques Villeglé*, has served the same purpose.
- 5 Did Pierre Restany willingly keep Jacques Villeglé in the margins in order to give more visibility to Raymond Hains? Did he knowingly overlook his first attempts at theorising his own reasoning? The perusal of the three telephone conversations conducted by P. Restany with each one of the *affichistes* (J. Villeglé, R. Hains and F. Dufrêne) on December 16, 1961, tends to prove that the critic was fully aware of the existence of the text “Des Réalités collectives” published in the ultra-lettrist review *grâmmes* in 1958 and that he knew what his motives were. “Des Réalités collectives” is indeed a “clarification,” to quote J. Villeglé. He provided the critic with arguments at the very moment when he discovered the ripped posters during the 1957 exhibition *Loi du 29 juillet 1881* at the Colette Allendy gallery. “Des Réalités collectives” refutes the affiliation of these unstuck posters (*décollages*) with the spirit of cubist collages, which P. Restany elaborates upon in his article “Collages”⁸ published in 1957 in the review *Cimaise*.

grâmmes, n°2, 1958



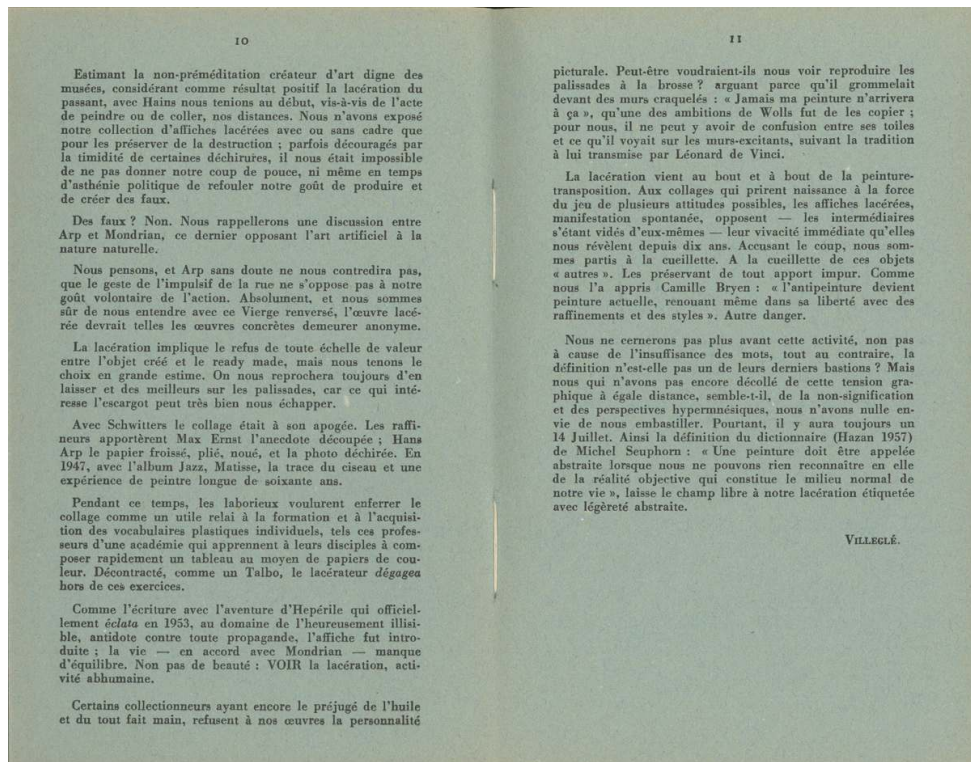
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Jacques Villeglé, “Des Réalités collectives,” *grâmmes*, n°2, 1958, n. pag.



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Jacques Villeglé, "Des Réalités collectives," *grâmmes*, n°2, 1958, n. pag.



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- 6 J. Villeglé definitely acknowledges the three interviews conducted by P. Restany who, in 1961, approached each member of New Realism with the aim of preparing a monograph on the movement.⁹ *Les Nouveaux Réalistes : un manifeste de la nouvelle peinture*¹⁰ was eventually published in 1968 by Planète editions. The fifth chapter of the book, entitled "L'invention de la palissade" is entirely dedicated to the *affichistes*. It consists of an introduction and a sub-part which define the poster as a basic element of urban reality. A section titled "Raymond Hains et Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé" introduces "L'invention de la palissade – L'Envers du problème : Dufrène", then "Rotella et l'affiche romaine". Over thirty pages, P. Restany assesses the phenomenon of ripped posters, presents their singularity, lists the peculiarities of each author, and puts their collaborations into perspective. The three biographies of the French *affichistes* written in 1961 all have similar contents and feed P. Restany's text. They enumerate the major pieces, the first exhibitions and important events in chronological order. They make an inventory of publications and give the timeline of when they became acquainted with one another. By bringing together these different elements, we have the demonstration that Restany had access to as much information on J. Villeglé's career as on that of his fellow *affichistes*. However, the synthesis published by Planète editions does not do justice to this. J. Villeglé's work appears very much in the background with only a few lines devoted to it on pages 67 and 68.

Biography of Jacques Villeglé

Jacques de la Villeglé, né le 27 Mars 1926
à Quimper (Finistère)
Ecole Nationale et Supérieure des
B^x A – Architecture.

1949-56: Films avec R. Hains et
affiches lacérées.

1953: Hépérile éclaté.

1957: Exposition "Loi du 29 juillet
1881" Galerie Colette Allendy.

1958: GRâmmes.

Juin 1959: Exposition du Lacré Anonyme.

Octobre 1959: Affiches lacérées pour la Salle
des Informels, 1^{re} Première
Biennale de Paris.

Mars 1960: Salon Comparaisons.

X

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d'art

Biography of Raymond Hains

Raymond Hains, né le 9 Novembre 1926
à St Brieuc (Côte du Nord)

1946: Premières photos abstraites.

1947: "Les Trésors de Golconde", photo
Plaisir de France.
- La Chambre cannelée
- Affiches lacérés

Juin 1948: Exposition de photographies abstraites,
Galerie Colette Allendy.
- Décroché au Salon National de
la Photographie.

1949-56: Films abstraits.

1952: Almanach Dioma (n°5): Quand
la photographie devient objet. - "les
appareils destinés à enregistrer les
images et les sons servent aujourd'hui
à enregistrer d'AUTRES images et
d'AUTRES sons.

Octobre 1952: Exposition Mondiale de la Photographie.

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d'art

Biography of François Dufrêne

François Dufrêne né le 21 Septembre 1930 à Paris.

1946-1954: Poèmes Lettristes (manifestations publiques; revues Fontaine, U.R., Ion, Panorama des Nouveaux Poètes Français, textes dans diverses revues françaises et étrangères; émissions radiophoniques [France, Italie, Japon]; sonorisation d'exposition de peinture.

Mars 1950: Premier récital personnel de poèmes Lettristes, à la Maison des Lettres, Paris.

Avril 1952: "Tambours du Jugement Premier", film imaginaire, sans écran ni pellicule, présenté en marge du Festival de Cannes.

1953-1954: Textes pour le Soulèvement de la Jeunesse.

Mars 1953: Manifeste Pour un Cri Automatique.

1954: Revue En Marge.

Octobre 1955: Récital galerie l'Escalier (poèmes Lettristes et CRIRYTHMES ultralettristes).

• Premiers DESSOUS D'AFFICHES

Décembre 1957: Revue GRANDES: L'Après-

Biography of François Dufrêne

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d'art

Demain d'im Phonème; "Le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse, théorème et démonstration d'une poésie infra-lettriste.

Mai 1958: Récital galerie Numéro, Florence.

Juin 1959: Dessous d'affiches à l'exposition du Lacéré Anonyme.

Octobre 1959: Dessous d'affiches pour le Plafond de la Salle de Musique et Première audition publique de la Suite Magnétique (nouveaux crirythmes) à la Première Biennale de Paris.

Octobre 1959: Galerie Irma Hoenigsberg.

Mars 1960: Organisateur du Salon Comparaisons, Salle Dite-Expérimentale. Y expose le "Décor de l'Envers".

X

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d'art

- 7 How might this obvious imbalance be explained? P. Restany appears to bear a grudge against J. Villeglé for trying to initiate a dialogue by publishing a reaction to his 1957 article. Indeed, the critic never mentioned J. Villeglé’s attempts at theorisation, all but ignoring “Des Réalités collectives”, but also the exhibition *Lacéré anonyme* (1959). With the tag “lacéré anonyme,” J. Villeglé creates something of a collective unconscious, the true author of the pieces, at work on the posters long before they are appropriated. The removal eventually acts as a revelation. By marginalising these two fundamental events in J. Villeglé’s creative career, one leaves aside the strong links he created with F. Dufrêne, the dialogue between the two being often disposed of in favour of the exclusive pair R. Hains / J. Villeglé. It is precisely alongside *Le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse* (1958), F. Dufrêne’s influential work, that “Des Réalités collectives” finds its place. F. Dufrêne was also the one, let’s not forget, who accommodated the exhibition *Lacéré anonyme* in his studio. Immersed for many years in the poetic and lettrist milieu, reading anthologies and attending recitals, J. Villeglé, along with F. Dufrêne, was influenced by the people he socialized with in developing the theme of *La Lettre lacérée*, which we could see as a symbolical way of transcribing the rhythm-cry.¹¹ J. Villeglé collaborated directly with F. Dufrêne by co-authoring *La Baleine blanche* (ripped poster on plywood, February 1958) to which the biographies written by Restany allude. Lastly, it was through F. Dufrêne that J. Villeglé appropriated *Carrefour Sèvres-Montparnasse, juillet 1961*, one of his most significant early paintings, bought by the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Pompidou) in 2002. During preparations for the second Biennale des Jeunes de Paris, F. Dufrêne noticed a large palisade which had just been dismantled. He immediately warned his friend J. Villeglé who arrived to find a huge roll of posters on the pavement. Straight away, he took them to the exhibition room and submitted them as in situ works.¹² By reassessing J. Villeglé’s position on the art scene of the 1950s and 1960s, and by going beyond the duality R. Hains / J. Villeglé, one can undoubtedly approach their practice in a renewed, broader way.

NOTES

1. The first in this series of exhibitions organized in collaboration with the Vallois gallery in Paris was entitled *Jacques Villeglé : Mots – Affiches lacérées 1949-1996*.
2. Marcel Despard, Yvonne Mottet, Bernard Lys and Claude Makovski. First handed out on leaflets during the first Biennale des Jeunes de Paris, the manifesto was also printed in *Le Journal de l’amateur d’art* of December 10, 1959.
3. Jouffroy, Alain. *Les Pré-voyants*, Brussels: La Connaissance, 1974 (Témoins et témoignages / Actualité) (Witnesses and testimonies / News).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 12
5. Jacques Villeglé has classified all of his ripped posters in a thematic *catalogue raisonné*, several volumes of which have been published by Marvel and Ides & Calendes editions.
6. The “Affichistes” file contains information – notes, interviews, exhibition catalogues, invitation cards, press releases, etc. – about the three French poster affichistes. The earliest sources go back to March 1960 and were probably put together when organizing the seminal

exhibition *Les Nouveaux Réalistes* at the Apollinaire gallery in Milan. Mimmo Rotella had not yet rallied the group; the fact that he joined New Realism only later in part explains why a separate file is specifically dedicated to him.

7. Published in *Luna Park*, n°6, Spring 2011, pp. 56-75

8. Restany, Pierre. “Collages,” in *Cimaise*, n°1 (5th series), September-October 1957

9. In conversation with the author (interview conducted in September 2012 at the artist’s studio in preparation for this article)

10. Restany, Pierre. *Les Nouveaux Réalistes : un manifeste de la nouvelle peinture*, Paris: Planète Editions, 1968

11. The rhythm-cry was invented by F. Dufrêne. It is a form of sound poetry created directly for the tape recorder, and which cannot be transcribed in writing on paper.

12. A creative process which J. Villeglé explained to C. Francblin in conversation (Base AGORHA CFRAN.XBS001) for the catalogue *Images : affiches lacérées 1958-1991*, Paris: Vallois gallery, 2001.